

JAPAN: Rebirth of a Nation (1)

Illustrated by Ralph Lane



On Aug. 6, 1945, an Atom Bomb screamed out of the sky and rained death on Hiroshima, Japan. Three days later, a second A-bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Seventy-three thousand were killed. The two history-shaking explosions ended a mighty nation's bid for world conquest, for on Aug. 14, 1945, the Japanese surrendered unconditionally.



The atom bomb killed Japan's will to war. Then, soon after, another—even mightier—force blasted the feudal foundations of the Japan we all knew. This force was democracy—a way of life new to Japan's 80,000,000 patient, persevering people.

The democratization of the centuries-old feudal empire is the story of the most successful occupation in history. It began with demilitarization. Every smouldering spark of militarism and ultra-nationalism was stamped out. Shintoism, a religion professing Japan's divine right to rule the world, was outlawed and Shinto statues removed from public display.

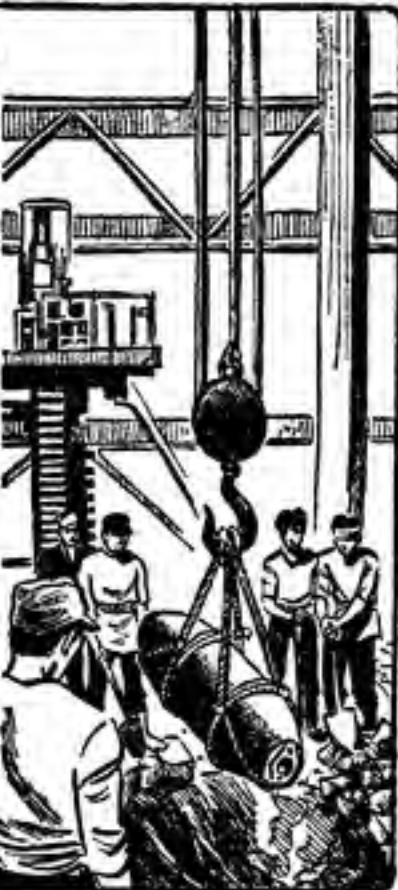


Banning the production of arms and armament, the U. S. tossed Japan's mighty war-machine on the scrap pile. The demilitarization phase of the occupation was completed with the trial of 24 major war criminals in April, 1948. On December 23, Hideki Tojo and six other war lords mounted the gallows.

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Production facilities crippled by allied air and sea attacks; stockpiles largely exhausted; foreign trade lines severed; an exhausted and deranged economy---that is a size-up of the conditions confronting SCAP, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, in 1945. Grim was the fact that Japan could not earn her way into a peaceful world.

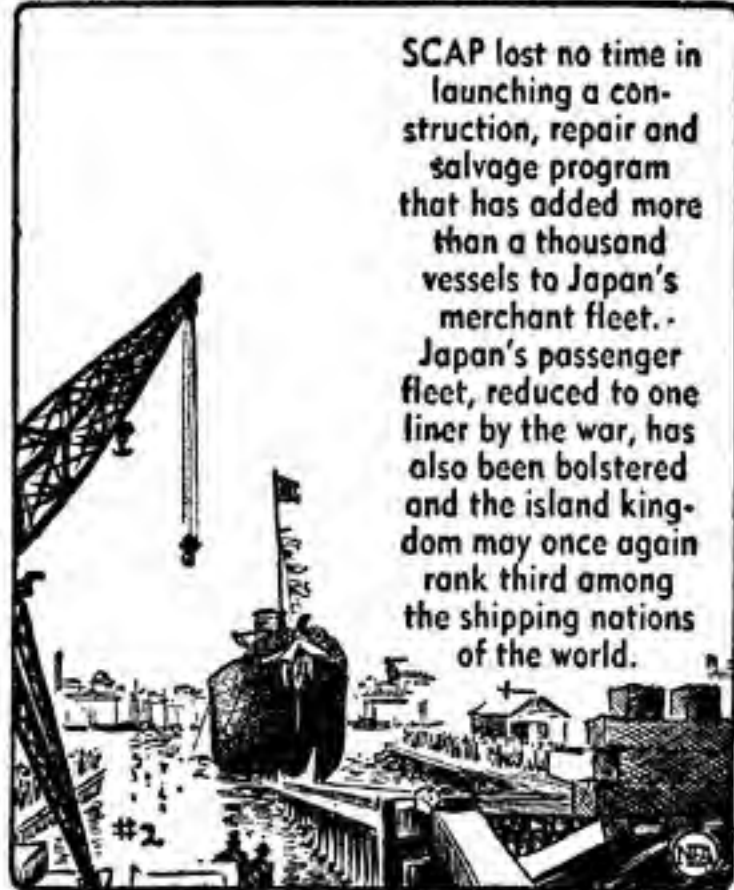


While U. S. know-how tackled the task of putting Japan's war-shattered industry back on its feet, SCAP outlawed monopolies, and smashed the Zaibatsu, the powerful handful of families controlling the major part of Japan's industry. Their stocks and bonds were seized and sold to the public. Business was reorganized and controls administrated.

Seeking to establish Japan on a self-supporting basis through foreign trade, SCAP next turned its attention to Japan's skeletonized merchant fleet, reduced by Allied bombs and torpedoes from 6.7 million gross tons in 1941 to about 1.6 million gross tons at the end of the war. Only half of the ships surviving the war were proclaimed serviceable.



SCAP lost no time in launching a construction, repair and salvage program that has added more than a thousand vessels to Japan's merchant fleet. Japan's passenger fleet, reduced to one liner by the war, has also been bolstered and the island kingdom may once again rank third among the shipping nations of the world.



JAPAN: Rebirth of a Nation (3)

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Japan's oldest enemy is starvation. Although the Japanese are skillful farmers of their pathetically small fields and rice paddies, less than 19 per cent of the country's 91,000,000 acres can be cultivated. In 1945, bad weather, fertilizer shortages and the ravages of war had left the Japanese farmer face to face with his age-old foe.



With plant insects and diseases reducing Japan's crops by at least 12 per cent annually, one of SCAP's first jobs was to promote the widespread use of insecticide dusts and aerosols. The timely importation of fertilizer and the development of a seed improvement program have also paid big production dividends.

Until SCAP stepped into the farm picture, spoilage ranked high on the empire's list of Public Enemies. Lacking refrigeration facilities, whole carloads of potatoes often rotted in transit. SCAP licked the problem by modernizing ancient methods of drying, pickling and salting vegetables, and constructing rodent-proof, air-cooled storage facilities.



But best news for the farmer was the new government's purchase of 4.6 million acres from feudal landlords. When the land was sold at lowered interest rates, some 3,000,000 long-exploited tenant farmers became land owners for the first time in their lives. Farmer-controlled cooperatives and democratically-elected land commissions dealt a final death blow to the old tenancy system.

